

# HISTORIAN

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

MAY, 2000

## MAY HAPPENINGS

The May meeting of the Hancock County Historical Society will be held on Thursday, May 18 at the Kate Lobrano House, 108 Cue Street, Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi.

The speaker will be Donna Hutchings, Literacy Coordinator of the Waveland Library Literacy Program, sponsored by the Hancock County Library System.

Please call 467-4090 for reservations at \$6.00.

## SOCIETY NEWS

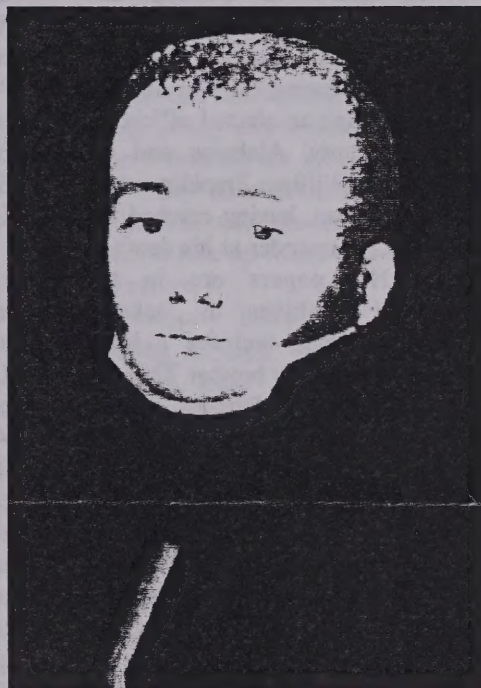
Work is nearing completion on the vertical files. It just goes to prove that if you put enough competent people on a project for five months, anything can be accomplished.

During April we had a total of 285 volunteer hours spent on this project and special appreciation is due Kay and Jack Kistler and Vickie Ryhiner, who have worked tirelessly since January remaking the files.

Mary Bowers and Ruth Good have created a binder-file system for photographs at every address in the county. They have combined information from the Utility Billing System, phone books, the Mississippi Coast Cross Reference Directory and any printed matter that lists people in reference to any specific address.

In these binders, one or more pages are designated for every address in the county. Each page will contain a half-page photograph (thanks to our wonderful digital camera) of the building(s) on the property and subse-

continued on page 3



Thomas Shields  
from a miniature

## THOMAS SHIELDS FOR WHOM SHIELDSBORO WAS NAMED

The residents of Bay Saint Louis apparently were referred to throughout the 1700s simply as living on the Bay of Saint Louis with no further designation being felt necessary. As late as 1802 records show that twins were baptized "in the house of Pedro Fayard at Bay of Saint Louis." However, shortly thereafter, the name Shieldsboro appears on maps and documents and remains in use until it was changed once more to Bay Saint Louis by the Mississippi legislature on April 27, 1875.

It was named for Thomas Shields

who received title to the old Constantio Tardil land grant that had been previously issued but the property was never occupied. Mr. Shields' home stood where Chessy's Antiques and Beach Antiques Mall are located next to Tercentenary Park.

The following letter is from Mr. Shields' great-great-granddaughter, Maureen Murphy Singleton of Houston, Texas and the photograph to the left was taken from a miniature painting on an heirloom brooch in her possession.

## THE LIFE OF THOMAS SHIELDS

Thomas Shields, purser of New Orleans, (my 3<sup>rd</sup> great grandfather) was born at Bohemia Manor, Delaware in 1783. (Transcription of note regarding Thomas Shields and brothers; Article on the original grave of Thomas Shields, Purser). His father was Thomas Shields who was a merchant in Delaware, left there when his sons Samuel Bayard Shields and Thomas were young and went to Abbeville, South Carolina. I'm not sure when he made this trip but it was between 1783 when Thomas was born and 1790 when his next child, William Franklin Shields was born. William and Theodore, the two youngest children had a different mother from the older two. One other source I have, an excerpt from a letter written in the late 1800's, mentions a sister of Thomas, named Fransena, who lived in the Washington, D.C. area, with whom he frequently corresponded and visited on numerous occasions with his wife Ellen and children.

O2 January 1804 Thomas entered the Navy from Middletown, Delaware as Midshipman. A capsule of

his service is enclosed. (Navy Department, Bureau of Navigation 11 December 1931).

As you can tell from these records which I received from Dr. Dudley, Thomas never retired from the Navy. The copies of letters regarding his service mention written requests made by him for leaves to settle accounts. I am not sure where such letters could be found but if you have a suggestion please let me know.

As to his exploits in the War of 1812, I am sure you are aware, since this is documented in a number of books. In "British at the Gates" by Robin Reilly, a fellow officer in the area was Dr. David C. Ker, Andrew Jackson's Chief of Surgery. Either Dr. Ker's daughter, Ellen (my 3<sup>rd</sup> great grandmother or his sister, Carolina made the welcoming remarks to Andrew Jackson on his victorious entry into New Orleans after the conclusion of the War of 1812.

Ellen Blanchard Ker, daughter of Dr. David C. Ker and Margaret Benson Ker was born in Fredericksburg, Virginia and married Thomas Shields at the age of 16 at Shieldsborough, Mississippi. They had five children who are listed on the family group sheet I sent you, along with their respective spouses.

Thomas died in 1827. After his death, Ellen remarried, she married Levy Peirce (or Pierce), secretary of State for Louisiana. As far as I know they had no children as she died the next year. As for the children of Thomas and Ellen, the three girls apparently became the wards of Levy Pierce, for they were given land (several blocks of property just west of downtown New Orleans) by him in 1835.

Wilmer, their oldest son, became the Ward of Dr. William Newton Mercer, a good friend and Army surgeon during the War of 1812. There was such a close connection that many in the family think he was more than a friend. There was a Dr. Hugh Mercer in Fredericksburg, Va. Where the Kers came from and Dr. Mercer is listed as

having come from Virginia, so he may have been related through the Kers. Wilmer also entered the Navy having attended the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis. He later retired from military service at the request of Dr. Mercer to assist in running his six plantations in Mississippi (Buckhurst, Oakland, Deer Park, Laurel Hill, Ellis Cliff) and Louisiana (Bohemia). Wilmer inherited Buckhurst, Oakland and Bohemia from Dr. Mercer.

Thomas' brother Theodore was an officer during the War of 1812 before becoming an elected official in Marengo County, Alabama and his other brother William Franklin was a career Navy man, having reached the position of commander at his death in 1856. His papers are in the Mississippi Archives in Jackson, Mississippi, which includes a letter either to or from his brother Thomas. His older brother, Samuel Bayard Shields was an attorney. His papers are listed in NUCMC. But I am not sure at this point where they are. Samuel's son Benjamin Glover Shields who represented Marengo Co., Al. in Congress and was later sent by appointment of President Polk to represent the United States at Venezuela. He later moved to Falls County, Texas.

William Bayard Shields, Thomas' cousin, was Secretary of State of Delaware and moved to the Mississippi Territory in 1803 or thereabouts. He became a Territorial Judge and was later Supreme Court Judge for the State of Mississippi.

Another cousin was Thomas Rodney, brother of Caesar Rodney, signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Another cousin was James Bayard, one of the representatives at the signing of the Treaty of Ghent.

Another cousin was William Bayard at whose home Alexander Hamilton died after his duel with Aaron Burr. An unusual coincidence is that Aaron Burr, after that altercation, was arrested and later defended by William Bayard Shields.

The judge for that trial was Thomas Rodney. Hence, three cousins were involved in that one incident - William Bayard who owned the home at which Alexander Hamilton died, W. B. Shields who defended the accused and Thomas Rodney who served as judge.

Joseph Dunbar Shields, son of William Bayard Shields was also a judge in Mississippi and wrote two books, "The Life and Times of Sargent Smith Prentiss" (SSP was the tutor for the Shields children) and "Natchez, its Early History" which includes a description of the character of Thomas Shields. Joseph D. Shields' papers are in a repository at LSU.

As for your question regarding Shieldsborough I am enclosing several items which were sent to me by the Hancock County Library System and which are confirmed in the records of the American State Papers. In 1789 the Spanish government granted this land to Constantio Tardil. The next year it was granted to Thomas Shields. Since at that time Thomas, the purser, would only have been 7 years old it must have been his father who received this grant. As far as I know the older Thomas never lived on this land. He died in 1803 in South Carolina. There is a book documenting the Bayard genealogy which mentions the older Thomas' brother, Archibald, as having gone earlier to New Orleans as a merchant. I have found no verification of this but that may be true as other members of the family - Thomas Rodney, William Bayard Shields (son of Archibald) and Thomas the purser all end up in that Natchez, New Orleans, Shieldsborough triangle.

In 1816 Thomas, the purser, and Ellen were married at Shieldsborough. This was during the summer and many inhabitants of New Orleans had their summer homes there. I don't believe Thomas and Ellen lived there permanently. The 1820 census has them living in St. Tammany Parish, just on the other

side of the Pearl River and I have a deed property there, situated on the Pearl River which Thomas sold to Dr. David C. Ker, Ellen's father 09 June 1820.

In 1823 Thomas, Ellen and family were living with Dr. David C. Ker in downtown New Orleans. I'm not sure if they remained there or not. But I believe Thomas may have been having financial difficulties. It appears that he owned land all over, including Mexico (probably Texas at the time), Honduras and South America.

In 1818 Shieldsborough was officially designated as a town (Acts Passed at the First Session of the First General Assembly, State of Mississippi) It remained thus until 1875 when it changed back to Bay St. Louis ("Steamboat, Yellow Jack, and the Six Sisters). I have a copy of the documents related to this claim which are in the Private Land Claim papers of the National Archives. According to the American State Papers it was recommended in 1820 that Congress not ratify the Spanish land grant awarded to Thomas Shields. The papers in the National Archives seem to begin the dispute in 1820. It appears from the documents that this dispute continues until the early 1920's when the land was then awarded to a resort complex. As best I can tell since no heirs ever really came forward to claim or fight for the land it left the family.

A strange coincidence is that my great grandfather was attempting to determine the disposition of that land and whether the family had any right to it in the 1930's and 40's. He died in 1941

I am sure you are aware that there was a destroyer named for Purser Shields in World War II. The family has photos and mementos of the commissioning of this ship. It was decommissioned and sold to the Brazilian government in the 1970's.

The last correspondence I received from Dr. Dudley stated that his book would be out and around 1992. So, if he is on schedule, it should be out in about a year.

I have a great deal more information if you are interested.

Sincerely, Maureen

**Society** from page 1

quent pages will have whatever earlier photographs we have or may acquire and any additional information about the property.

We need photographers. The camera is easy to operate, point-and-shoot type. It uses no film so you cannot waste shots. Just take 20 pictures, we plug it to the computer and download them. If you don't like any one of them, simply go re-take it. It is an excellent task for anyone who walks up to a full city block at a time.

Mr. and Mrs. Marvin Bailey had begun photographing Diamondhead for us just before I dunked the camera in my fishpond. They have returned to their residence in Illinois for the summer, but I expect them to take up where they left off when they return.

As previously mentioned, we are photographing EVERY building in the county. The Bay, Waveland, Kiln, Pearlinton, Ansley, north county, wherever you are, we need you!

George Israel who commutes from Bay Saint Louis to New Orleans to work at a wonderful book store in the Quarter, brought us a \$500 bond on the Biloxi Electric Railway and Power Co. issued in 1903. This company had a New Orleans style trolley that ran from Biloxi to Pass Christian along the beach except for a few blocks in downtown Gulfport when it was routed inland. It still has all forty coupons redeemable over a twenty year period at \$15 each.

Last year we supplied several photographs of the aftermath of Camille to Anthony Mattina, a Gulfport Automotive Sales Consultant/song writer, singer, producer. Barbara Schloegel brought us a copy of Mr. Mattina's audio tape about that fateful event. It is titled *Hurricane Camille* with Mr. Mattina doing the vocal. It's package has eight of our photographs showing the devastation of the storm. The tapes sell for \$5.

Thanks to members Ernest Serpas of Biloxi and Mosetta Winn of Poplarville for information on the Holden-Thompson Cemetery near McLeod Park. Included is a partial inventory and a diagram of the cemetery.

Several others have called in or

brought by, information on various cemeteries since our last newsletter article on our research. Please share with us any knowledge you may have. It could be very valuable to someone doing research.

The Hancock Bar Association held a luncheon meeting at the Loblano House on Monday, May 1st honoring Judge Dan Russell at a scrumptious meal catered by Carol's Old Town. Mac Haas brought us a large frame containing photographs of the Association's members in 1984.

We are very pleased to have these because they will be used in our "Profiles of Hancock County" publication that we are working on.

Charles H. Gray

#### New members

Linda Tomasich, Bay Saint Louis  
Gerald Tomasich, Bay Saint Louis  
Anthony Necaie, Gulfport, Ms  
Synthia K. Leblanc, Metairie/Waveland  
Joy Galloway, Bay Saint Louis  
Gloria Penton, Carriere, Ms.

#### LOBRANO HOUSE HOURS

MONDAY	8 a.m.
through	to
FRIDAY	4 p.m.

THE

## HISTORIAN

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

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Editor	Edith Back

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HANCOCK COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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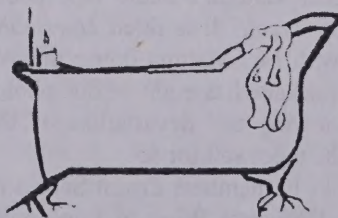
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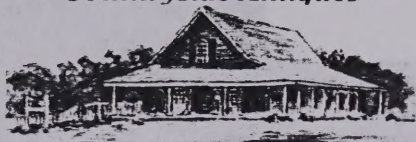


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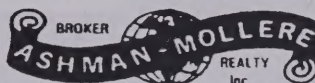
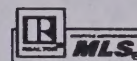
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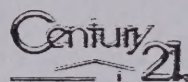
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
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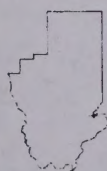
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